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WASHINGTON - After dubbing President Bush's "open door" border policy a threat to national security, Rep. Tom Tancredo says, he got a call from Bush aide Karl Rove proposing that he never again "darken the doorstep of the White House." He's glad that the non-invite apparently didn't extend to the annual congressional Christmas party.

"It means a lot to my wife," quips the third-term Colorado Republican, who attended the White House event Monday.

There's no question that a public rift with a Republican president is a tough career move for any aspiring GOP lawmaker. But for Mr. Tancredo, who came to the House after running a libertarian think tank in Golden, Colo., standing up for ideas is what politics is about - and for him, no policy is more vital than controlling borders and ending the "cult of multiculturalism" that sees the US as "groups of victimized classes."

This week, he joined 66 other House Republicans who voted against intelligence reforms over the issue of border-security. They didn't prevail, but their opposition slowed action on the measure and showed that some GOP lawmakers are ready to wield a new level of assertiveness in Bush's second term.

That doesn't mean the president faces an open revolt from within his party, but there is a new restiveness in Republican ranks on issues ranging from Social Security reform to national defense and the budget deficit. The new voices aren't the biggest names in the party. Some haven't been around long enough to bang a gavel. And party isn't their first loyalty.

"I'll never have any institutional power," Tancredo says. "I'll never be given a chairmanship. The only two things I have are my voice and my vote, and I have to use them as effectively as I can."

Before the Nov. 2 election, some would-be naysayers downplayed rifts with the White House, largely because they didn't want to see a Democrat naming Supreme Court Justices. Now, with President Bush heading into a second term, they're drawing lines in the sand for the 109th Congress, in which the GOP will enjoy a 29-seat House margin.

Take Rep. Mike Pence. The two-term Indiana lawmaker shot to celebrity among conservative activists after standing up to pressure from the White House and GOP House leaders during an epic 2003 Medicare vote that stretched out to nearly three, bone-crunching hours. More than 70 conservatives signed a petition against the bill. In the end only 25, including Pence, voted to defeat it.

"He is one of those people who is respected because he will always vote his principles, as irritating as that may be to some of the Republican leadership in the House," says Richard Lessner, executive director of the American Conservative Union, which invited Pence to be the keynote speaker that winter.

A talk radio host before coming to Congress, Pence resists pressure with conspicuous grace. "He is animated by, informed by, and motivated by his religious faith and his conservatism," says attorney Greg Garrison, who took over Pence's show when he moved to Washington.

After only four years on Capitol Hill, the Indiana lawmaker was just elected to chair the influential Republican Study Committee. With about 100 members (complete headcounts are never released), the RSC is "the majority of the majority," Pence says, citing Speaker Dennis Hastert's formula that most Republicans must support a bill before it can move to the floor. He expects to have a say in what moves in the new Congress, and is signaling that Bush cannot count on a rubber stamp from House conservatives.

"House conservatives must rally support in Congress and the country for President Bush's agenda where it conforms to the ideals of limited government," he wrote last month. But they must also "undo" much of the 2001 campaign finance reform act, roll back the entitlement elements of the Medicare prescription-drug law, and reverse the federal role in education advanced in the No Child Left Behind Act, the president's signature domestic program, he urged. Unlike previous RSC chairs, Pence resigned his party role as deputy whip to avoid "serving two masters."

Rep. Jeff Flake (R) of Arizona is another potential breakaway - on the issue of fiscal policy. Formerly with a think tank and lobbying group, Mr. Flake in his two terms has voted against a bigger federal role in education, the creation of a Homeland Security Department, farm subsidies, and most annual appropriations bills. Recently, he has attacked pork projects so relentlessly that GOP Rep. John Peterson summoned groundhog celebrity Punxsutawney Phil to Capitol Hill this week to defend his \$100,000 earmark for a weather museum in Punxsutawney, Pa. - and invited Flake to attend. (He did.) The earmark was one of \$25 billion in pork spending in the \$322 billion omnibus spending measure signed by Bush this week.

GOP moderates, who played a big role reining in the Bush agenda on tax cuts and energy policy in the Senate, are also gearing up for a more vigorous role in the 109th Congress. The Republican Main Street Partnership counts 12 senators and at least 50 House members. They are planning a push to support fiscal restraint and stem-cell research that could put them at odds with Bush.

Rep. Mark Kirk (R) of Illinois, a cochair of the moderate Tuesday Group, says "The agenda I have is to reorient the work of the Congress to more accurately reflect the problems facing people in the suburbs." He also plans to push Republicans to get back to their Teddy Roosevelt roots in the environmental movement. As a student in Britain, he worked as an aide in the House of Commons and saw "Soviet-style" party loyalty up close. "The overwhelming loyalty of a member of Congress should be not to a party platform but to their state and the people in it," says the former Navy intelligence officer, still active as a reservist.